104-10106-10050

JFK ACT RELEASE

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8-11-76

Executive Registry
76-8878/1

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

OLC from George Bush

Re" The Death of Roselli..

Pursuant to our meeting on the Hill with Inouye and Baker, I called Ed Levi, the Attorney General.

I told him that I would like to see the FBI get into the Roselli case. He says there is a meeting today to talk about it and feels there may be a qw way for FBI to involve itself.

I explained that since there had been calls to the Senators suggesting CIA was involved in the murder, I was most anxious to see the matter fully investigated so that CIA would be offciailly exonerated.

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~~Liebengood~~/Madigan

9 August 1976

SUBJECT: Johnny Roselli

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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

1. During the period September 1960 through February 1963, Johnny Roselli was utilized by the Agency in support of operations designed to assassinate Fidel Castro. Attached hereto is a detailed summary of Roselli's involvement in these operations which had been prepared for the DCI on 9 December 1970.

2. During the initial phase of the operation, Mr. James P. O'Connell, a retired senior Office of Security employee, contacted Mr. Robert Maheu, asking Mr. Maheu to identify someone within the underworld who would have contacts within the Cuban gambling syndicates. Mr. Maheu (a former contract employee of the Office of Security who had been utilized in various sensitive operations) introduced Mr. O'Connell to Roselli, who was believed to be a member of the Las Vegas underworld syndicate. Following this initial contact in September 1960, Roselli recruited other members of the underworld (Sam Giancana, Santos Trafficante, et al.) to assist in the attempts to assassinate Castro.

3. Following the failure of the initial attempts which had been primarily handled by the Office of Security, Roselli was turned over to Mr. William K. Harvey, a former senior DDO officer, who continued to utilize Roselli's underworld contacts in various unsuccessful attempts to assassinate Castro. Mr. Harvey's operations involving Roselli began in early 1962 and were terminated in February 1963. Mr. Harvey subsequently retired from the Agency in 1967, and he died of a heart attack on 9 June 1976.

4. Although Roselli's operational activity on behalf of the Agency had been terminated in February 1963, Mr. Harvey, and to a lesser extent Mr. O'Connell, were in contact with Roselli during the period 1964 through approximately 1970.

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[redacted]

These later contacts primarily concerned Roselli's legal difficulties culminating in his 1967 conviction by the Department of Justice on six counts of illegal entry into the United States, and his 1969 conviction on a conspiracy charge related to a "rigged" $400,000 card game.

5. While serving his prison sentence in the Federal Penitentiary in Seattle, Washington, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (I&NS) began deportation proceedings against Roselli. Roselli's attorney told the Agency that if we did not intercede with I&NS on Roselli's behalf, he would expose his involvement with the Agency. On 18 November 1970, the then DCI, Mr. Helms, flatly refused to intercede with I&NS, although the Agency was meeting with I&NS regarding the status of the deportation proceedings as late as March 1971. There has been no Agency contact with Roselli since approximately 1970, and at that time the limited contacts were of an unofficial nature through Mr. Harvey, Mr. O'Connell and/or Mr. Maheu.

6. The Agency's use of underworld figures to assassinate Castro has appeared widely in the news media, with the first public exposures occurring circa 1967, with more detailed accounts which identified Roselli appearing in the January-February 1971 Jack Anderson Columns in the Washington Post. The recent Congressional investigations of the Agency have prompted renewed publicity in this regard, and the 18 November 1975 Senate Select Committee report entitled "Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders" contains an accurate and very detailed summary of Roselli's activities on behalf of the Agency.

7. It should be noted that at no time was Roselli under formal contract with the Agency, and other than some minor reimbursements for expenses during the 1960-1963 period, Roselli did not receive any monies for his involvement in the operations.

[redacted] EYES ONLY

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

9 DEC 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : ROSELLI, Johnny

1. This memorandum is for information only.

2. In August 1960, Mr. Richard M. Bissell approached Colonel Sheffield Edwards to determine if the Office of Security had assets that may assist in a sensitive mission requiring gangster-type action. The mission target was Fidel Castro.

3. Because of its extreme sensitivity, only a small group was made privy to the project. The DCI was briefed and gave his approval. Colonel J. C. King, Chief, WH Division, was briefed, but all details were deliberately concealed from any of the JMWAVE officials. Certain TSD and Commo personnel participated in the initial planning stages, but were not witting of the purpose of the mission.

4. Robert A. Maheu was contacted, briefed generally on the project, and requested to ascertain if he could develop an entree into the gangster elements as the first step toward accomplishing the desired goal.

5. Mr. Maheu advised that he had met one Johnny Roselli on several occasions while visiting Las Vegas. He only knew him casually through clients, but was given to understand that he was a high-ranking member of the "syndicate" and controlled all of the ice-making machines on the Strip. Maheu reasoned that, if Roselli was in fact a member of the clan, he undoubtedly had connections leading into the Cuban gambling interests.

[redacted] EYES ONLY

[redacted]

[redacted]

6. Maheu was asked to approach Roselli, who knew Maheu as a personal relations executive handling domestic and foreign accounts, and tell him that he had recently been retained by a client who represented several international business firms which were suffering heavy financial losses in Cuba as a result of Castro's action. They were convinced that Castro's removal was the answer to their problem and were willing to pay a price of $150,000 for its successful accomplishment. It was to be made clear to Roselli that the U. S. Government was not, and should not, become aware of this operation.

7. The pitch was made to Roselli on 14 September 1960 at the Hilton Plaza Hotel, New York City. His initial reaction was to avoid getting involved but, through Maheu's persuasion, he agreed to introduce him to a friend, Sam Gold, who knew the "Cuban crowd." Roselli made it clear he did not want any money for his part and believed Sam would feel the same way. Neither of these individuals was ever paid out of Agency funds.

8. During the week of 25 September, Maheu was introduced to Sam who was staying at the Fontainebleau Hotel, Miami Beach. It was several weeks after his meeting with Sam and Joe, who was identified to him as a courier operating between Havana and Miami, that he saw photographs of both of these individuals in the Sunday supplemental "Parade." They were identified as Momo Salvatore Giancana and Santos Trafficant, respectively. Both were on the list of the Attorney General's ten most-wanted men. The former was described as the Chicago chieftain of the Cosa Nostra and successor to Al Capone, and the latter, the Cosa Nostra boss of Cuban operations. Maheu called this office immediately upon ascertaining this information.

9. In discussing the possible methods of accomplishing this mission, Sam suggested that they not resort to firearms but, if he could be furnished some type of potent pill, that could be placed in Castro's food or drink, it would be a much more effective operation. Sam indicated that he had a prospective nominee in the person of Juan Orta, a Cuban official who had been receiving kick-back payments from the gambling interests, who still had access to Castro, and was in a financial bind.

[redacted]

[redacted]
EYES ONLY

10. TSD was requested to produce six pills of high lethal content.

11. Joe delivered the pills to Orta. After several weeks of reported attempts, Orta apparently got cold feet and asked out of the assignment. He suggested another candidate who made several attempts without success.

12. Joe then indicated that Dr. Anthony Verona, one of the principal officers in the Cuban Exile Junta, had become disaffected with the apparent ineffectual progress of the Junta and was willing to handle the mission through his own resources.

13. He asked, as a prerequisite to the deal, that he be given $10,000 for organizational expenses and requested $1,000 worth of communications equipment.

14. Dr. Verona's potential was never fully exploited, as the project was canceled shortly after the Bay of Pigs episode. Verona was advised that the offer was withdrawn, and the pills were retrieved.

15. Of significant interest was an incident which involved a request levied by Sam upon Maheu.

> At the height of the project negotiations, Sam expressed concern about his girlfriend, Phyllis McGuire, who he learned was getting much attention from Dan Rowan while both were booked at a Las Vegas night club. Sam asked Maheu to put a bug in Rowan's room to determine the extent of his intimacy with Miss McGuire. The technician involved in the assignment was discovered in the process, arrested, and taken to the Sheriff's office for questioning. He called Maheu and informed him that he had been detained by the police. This call was made in the presence of the Sheriff's personnel.
>
> Subsequently, the Department of Justice announced its intention to prosecute Maheu along with the technician. On 7 February 1962, the Director of

[redacted]
EYES ONLY

[redacted]

Security briefed the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, on the circumstances leading up to Maheu's involvement in the wiretap. At our request, prosecution was dropped.

16. In May 1962, Mr. William Harvey took over as Case Officer, and it is not known by this Office whether Roselli was used operationally from that point on.

17. It was subsequently learned from the FBI that Roselli had been convicted on six counts involving illegal entry into the United States. Our records do not reflect the date of conviction, but it is believed to have been sometime during November 1967.

18. On 2 December 1968, Roselli, along with four other individuals, was convicted of conspiracy to cheat members of the Friars Club of $400,000 in a rigged gin rummy game.

19. Mr. Harvey reported to the Office of Security of his contacts with Roselli during November and December 1967 and January 1968. It was his belief that Johnny would not seek out the Agency for assistance in the deportation proceedings unless he actually faced deportation. Roselli expressed confidence that he would win an appeal.

20. On 17 November 1970, Maheu called James O'Connell, Roselli's first Case Officer, to advise that Maheu's attorney, Ed Morgan, had received a call from a Thomas Waddin, Roselli's lawyer, who stated that all avenues of appeal had been exhausted, and his client now faces deportation. Waddin indicated that, if someone did not intercede on Roselli's behalf, he would make a complete expose of his activities with the Agency.

21. On 18 November 1970, you were briefed on the latest development in this case, and it was decided that the Agency would not in any way assist Roselli. Maheu was so advised of the Agency's position, and he was in complete agreement with our stand. He further advised that he was not concerned about

[redacted]

[redacted]

any publicity as it affected him personally should Roselli decide to tell all. He stated he would advise us promptly of any developments that he may become aware of in this matter.

Howard J. Osborn
Director of Security

[redacted]

Castro Stalker Worked for the CIA

By Jack Anderson

The mystery man whom the Central Intelligence Agency recruited to assassinate Cuba's Fidel Castro has been laid up in the sick ward of the Los Angeles County jail.

He is handsome, hawk-faced John Roselli, once a dashing figure around Hollywood and Las Vegas, now a gray, 66-year-old inmate with a respiratory ailment.

Confidential FBI files identify him as "a top Mafia figure" who watched over "the concealed interests in Las Vegas casinos of the Chicago underworld."

Roselli has admitted to friends that he was a rum runner during the Roaring Twenties. Operating along the East Coast, he learned how to evade Coast Guard cutters and police patrols.

His name later became linked with the biggest names in the Chicago and Los Angeles underworlds. He also developed contacts in the Cuban underworld before Castro took over the Havana gambling casinos.

He had the right background for a hush-hush mission that the CIA was planning in 1961. As part of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the CIA hoped to knock off Castro and leave Cuba leaderless.

Risks Neck

Roselli was recruited for the job by Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent, who admitted to us that he had handled undercover assignments for the CIA. He refused, however, to discuss the details. This is the same Maheu, incidentally, who is now involved in a legal battle over phantom billionaire Howard Hughes' Nevada operations.

Roselli was so flattered over being asked to perform a secret mission for the U.S. government that he paid all his expenses out of his own pocket and risked his neck to land the assassination teams on the Cuban coast.

In James Bond fashion, he held whispered meetings in Miami Beach hotels with Cubans willing to make an attempt on Castro's life. Once, he called on Chicago racket boss Sam Giancana to line up a contact. The confidential files report that Giancana had "gambling interest and an interest in the shrimp business in Cuba." However, the Chicago gangster took no direct part in the assassination plot.

Roselli made midnight dashes to Cuba with his hired assassins in twin powerboats. Once a Cuban patrol ship turned its guns on his darkened boat, tore a hole in the bottom and sank the boat. Roselli was fished out of the water by the other boat, which escaped into the shadows.

In earlier columns, we reported how the CIA furnished Roselli with deadly poison capsules which he tried through a relative of Castro's chef to plant in the dictator's food. Later, marksmen armed with high-powered Belgian rifles attempted to infiltrate close enough to gun Castro down.

All told, six assassination attempts were made, the last in the spring of 1963. Throughout this period, Roselli worked under the direct supervision of two secret CIA agents, William Harvey and James (Big Jim) O'Connell.

Roselli's Reward

The FBI which got wind of the assassination plot, has tried to pump Roselli for information. But he was sworn to silence by the CIA, and up to this moment, he hasn't broken it.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department, as part of its crackdown on organized crime, tried to nail Roselli. The FBI discovered that his Chicago birth records had been forged, that his name was really Filippo Sacco and that he had come to this country from Italy as a child. He was convicted for failing to register as an alien.

He was also convicted for conspiracy to rig card games at Los Angeles' exclusive Friar's Club.

Of Roselli's two CIA associates, Harvey has now retired to Indianapolis and O'Connell is still on the CIA payroll. Both admitted to us a friendship with Roselli but refused to discuss their CIA activities. Harvey said he had a "high regard" for Roselli and called the Friar's Club case a "frame-up." Said Harvey: "The Friar's Club indictment was a phony. Roselli had no more to do with that than I had."

Roselli's lawyers are now trying to get clemency for their client, citing our stories about his secret CIA service.

Firearms Fiasco

Under pressure from the firearms lobby, the Treasury Department has failed to enforce a vital section of the 1968 federal firearms act.

The law was passed after the murders of Sen. Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King. It authorizes the Treasury Secretary to require full reports of all firearms and ammunition sales.

For the two years that the law has been in force, the Treasury Department has ignored this key provision. The gun industry has complained it would be a bookkeeping nightmare.

The federal government, which would have to compile all the sales data, has been reluctant to spend $100 million it would cost in computers and staff to maintain the firearms files.

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6 Attempts to Kill Castro Laid to CIA

By Jack Anderson

Locked in the darkest recesses of the Central Intelligence Agency is the story of six assassination attempts against Cuba's Fidel Castro.

For 10 years, only a few key people have known the terrible secret. They have sworn never to talk. Yet we have learned the details from sources whose credentials are beyond question.

We spoke to John McCone, who headed the CIA at the time of the assassination attempts. He acknowledged the idea had been discussed inside the CIA but insisted it had been "rejected immediately." He vigorously denied that the CIA had ever participated in any plot on Castro's life. Asked whether the attempts could have been made with his knowledge, he replied: "It could not have happened."

We have complete confidence, however, in our sources.

The plot to knock off Castro began as part of the Bay of Pigs operation. The intent was to eliminate the Cuban dictator before the motley invaders landed on the island. Their arrival was expected to touch off a general uprising, which the Communist militia would have had more trouble putting down without the charismatic Castro to lead them.

After the first attempt failed, five more assassination teams were sent to Cuba. The last team reportedly made it to a rooftop within shooting distance of Castro before they were apprehended. This happened around the last of February or first of March, 1963.

Nine months later, President Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas by Lee Harvey Oswald, a fanatic who previously had agitated for Castro in New Orleans and had made a mysterious trip to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City.

Among those privy to the CIA conspiracy, there is still a nagging suspicion—unsupported by the Warren Commission's findings—that Castro became aware of the U.S. plot upon his life and somehow recruited Oswald to retaliate against President Kennedy.

To set up the Castro assassination, the CIA enlisted Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent with shadowy contacts, who had handled other undercover assignments for the CIA out of his Washington public relations office. He later moved to Las Vegas to head up billionaire Howard Hughes' Nevada operations.

Maheu recruited John Roselli, a ruggedly handsome gambler with contacts in both the American and Cuban underworlds, to arrange the assassination. The dapper, hawk-faced Roselli, formerly married to movie actress June Lang, was a power in the movie industry until his conviction with racketeer Willie Bioff in a million-dollar Hollywood labor shakedown. The CIA assigned two of its most trusted operatives, William Harvey and James (Big Jim) O'Connell, to the hush-hush murder mission. Using phony names, they accompanied Roselli on trips to Miami to line up the assassination teams.

The full story reads like the script of a James Bond movie, complete with secret trysts at glittering Miami Beach hotels and midnight powerboat dashes to secret landing spots on the Cuban coast. Once, Roselli's boat was shot out from under him.

For the first try, the CIA furnished Roselli with special poison capsules to slip into Castro's food. The poison was supposed to take three days to act. By the time Castro died, his system would throw off all traces of the poison, so he would appear to be the victim of a natural if mysterious ailment.

Roselli arranged with a Cuban, related to one of Castro's chefs, to plant the deadly pellets in the dictator's food. On March 13, 1961, Roselli delivered the capsules to his contact at Miami Beach's glamorous Fontainebleau Hotel.

A couple of weeks later, just about the right time for the plot to have been carried out, a report out of Havana said Castro was ill. But he recovered before the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961.

Four more attempts were made on Castro's life.

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